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ABSTRACT

This pamphlet provides supervisors with a brief summary of pointers in personnel relations. (For related documents, see Ac 014 426-427, 429.) (KM)

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VA PAMPHLET 5-33

Common Sense About Supervising People

Key Points in Personnel Relations

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AC 014128

COMMON SENSE ABOUT SUPERVISING PEOPLE

HAIL TO THE CHIEF!

That's you, whatever the title you carry as supervisor.

And you're a VERY important person. Especially to the people you directly supervise.

They probably spend more of their waking time with you than they do even with their families!

YOU control their happiness and their productivity.

It's a heavy responsibility to supervise people: Whatever else you are doing you re also working with human beings and human happiness.

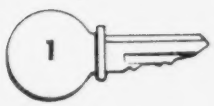
There are some tried and true ways of supervising people so that you, they, the VA, and the people we serve will *all* be satisfied.

HOW DO YOU GO ABOUT IT?

Well, the principal means is through improving the "personnel relations" within an organization. "Personnel relations" is simply "human relations" in a work setting. And "human relations" is nothing more than the ability to see things from the other person's side as well as your own.

On the following pages Mr. Common Sense lists some key points and tells us about some of the positive actions we can take in supervising our people.

Please keep in mind the fact that each action, *however minor it may seem in itself, contributes its share to the total attitude of the employee toward his job.*



MAKE SURE THE INDIVIDUAL EMPLOYEE KNOWS WHAT HE'S WORKING FOR

Every employee should know and understand what the mission of his station and division is. He should know what his contribution is to the fulfillment of that mission.

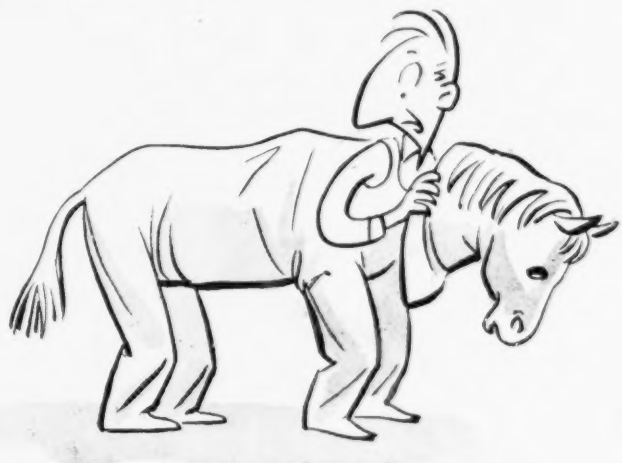
If, for example, he files claims folders all day long, he should be shown how that filing is indispensable to the process of compensating veterans fairly for their service-connected disabilities—and what delay in the adjudication of a claim can mean to the veteran.

When he understands the importance of his job, his respect for it and for himself will increase.

He needs also a wide variety of information about the rights, duties, privileges, and *obligations* of Government employment.

"I know you can't see much back there, but, believe me, without you the whole act would collapse."

But above all, he needs to feel that he "belongs." Most of this basic need can be satisfied by giving him general information of the "what's doing" variety. The urge to be "in the know" is deep-rooted in human nature.



MAKE SURE THE EMPLOYEE KNOWS WHAT HIS DUTIES ARE

"Oh my gosh, I forgot to tell him he's supposed to let go of it."

Another responsibility a supervisor has is giving the employee information about the scope and nature of his duties.

This means also that the lines of organization, responsibility, and authority must be made clear to him.

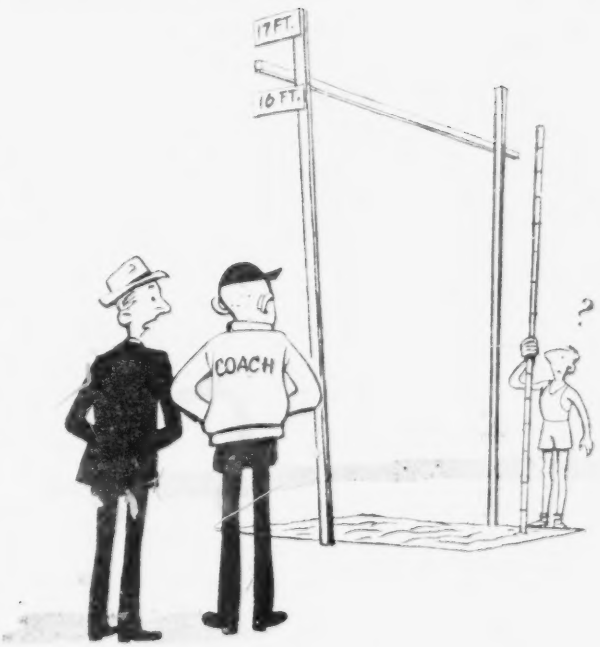
Some stations report that they have done more for employee job satisfaction by eliminating doubt and confusion in these matters than by any other single step that they might have taken.

SET HIGH STANDARDS OF PERFORMANCE

Most people want to be proud of what they are doing. Within reasonable limits, the more they accomplish, the prouder they are and the more they like their jobs. This is so even if they may sometimes, as a kind of hidden boasting, also gripe about how hard they work.

Conversely, if they are allowed to "get away with murder," or otherwise allowed to work in a sloppy fashion, they may enjoy for awhile the pleasure of being lazy. Eventually, though, they will become discontented.

Most employees would rather work in an efficient organization. They are not really happy with a supervisor who doesn't demand good work and who, instead, permits them to put out a product of which they are secretly ashamed.



"You sure do set high standards for your team, Coach!"

4 LET THE EMPLOYEE KNOW HOW HE IS DOING

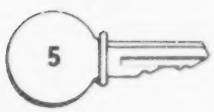
"This is not intended as criticism, dear. I merely wanted you to see the kind of output some of our competitors are achieving."

If we keep an employee in the dark as to how he is doing in his job, he's likely to be insecure and, therefore, less effective in his work.

"How Am I Doing Talks" are *not* to evaluate or sit in judgment on a worker's good or bad performance. The purpose *is* to help him get greater satisfaction from his work and thereby motivate him to do a better job.

These talks are intended to help a supervisor and the employee understand each other better, review together each other's problems and thinking, and decide how they can become a more successful supervisor-employee team.

This calls for a review of how the worker can improve, along with a discussion of how both of them can assist in improving results.



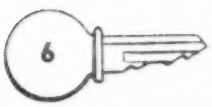
HELP YOUR PEOPLE TO DEVELOP THEIR ABILITIES

A supervisor who sets high standards of performance owes it to his people to let them know what those standards are, and to develop their abilities, primarily through training, so they can meet those standards.

Helping people to grow in their abilities and skills is one of the most important functions a supervisor has—and also one of the most gratifying.

The average employee wants to have the best use made of his present abilities so he won't be working at less than his highest skills. He also wants to have a fair chance to increase his skills and abilities.

It may take some special effort on the part of the supervisor to do this; but he will probably get a big return for his efforts.



GIVE THE EMPLOYEE THE TRAINING HE NEEDS TO DO HIS JOB WELL

An employee who is not doing well in his job usually knows it and is usually unhappy about it. He's much more likely to quit his job than one who has a feeling of success in what he is doing.

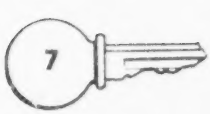
Everyone who is in charge of the work of other people, from the station manager on down to the first-line supervisor, has some responsibilities for training his employees.

"No, no, in your case it doesn't matter that your typing is a bit rusty. I'll be glad to arrange some on-the-job training for you."

Determining what training is needed, and how to do it, must be based upon a knowledge of what the training can be expected to accomplish, of production and operating problems that can be met through training, and of the individuals in need of training.

Existence of certain needs can be accepted on the basis of common sense and reasoning. Training *of some kind* is a practical necessity whenever—

- A new employee comes to work.
- An employee is assigned to a new or different job which he does not know.
- The methods of doing an old job are changed.
- Advancement opportunities require new or higher level skills.
- The mission, the organization, or the working relationships are substantially changed.



BUILD UP GROUP SOLIDARITY

When there is a united purpose in a group, it has pride in the work done there. This feeling of group solidarity is what might be called "team spirit." It is developed by the supervisor in various ways—some obvious, and some more subtle—

- He lets the group know of its achievements.
- He stands up for the group by praising it, and fighting for its rights and privileges.
- He makes sure that new employees are smoothly assimilated into the group.
- He avoids excessive interference and supervision.
- He sees that physical working conditions are as good as he can make them.

He gives the group a sense of direction and a feeling of unity and responsibility by keeping them aware of the main objectives of the organization, the ways in which the group's efforts contribute to these objectives, and the extent of the group's success.

Success itself is probably the greatest stimulant to new successes.

ASK YOUR PEOPLE FOR HELP IN SOLVING OPERATING PROBLEMS

Instead of driving employees to do more work, ask their help in solving your operating problems. In this way, we allow them to *participate* in something beyond the usual limits of their jobs. This is adopting a kind of supervision that recognizes the importance of the individual and it pays dividends.

This method of managing people takes many forms. We use it, for example:

- When we ask people who will use a new procedure or policy for their ideas about it before putting it into effect.
- When we call a staff meeting and say, "Here's the problem. What do you think we should do?"
- When we ask them for their ideas and help in planning work.
- When we demonstrate that we want them to offer their ideas on how our unit can do a better job and, in general, to speak their minds.

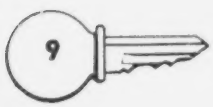
In brief, we are using it whenever we lead those under us to feel that they share responsibility for the work and that their ideas are sincerely valued—even when they may not agree with our own.

"That's Brown with his group. He believes people ought to put their heads together when there are problems to solve."

Caution! Don't call your employees together to get their ideas on a matter about which you have already made up your mind. They'll sense it every time and your stock will go down.

This approach to supervision should not be confused with weak or spineless supervision. Actually, it requires a strong leader, confident of his abilities.

Giving our employees a chance to think does not take away from us the right to decide. In the final analysis, YOU must make the decision and initiate action.



KEEP YOUR EMPLOYEES INFORMED ABOUT MATTERS THAT AFFECT THEM

Have you ever been involved in a suddenly announced "reorganization?" Have you ever, without explanation, found yourself reassigned to different work? Or discovered one morning that you had a new chief?

Have you ever had the feeling of "what's going to happen next," or not knowing "what's going on up there?"

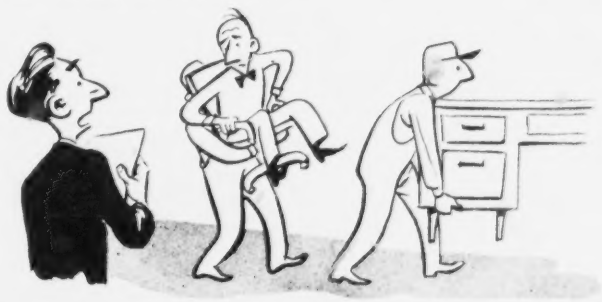
If you have had this kind of experience, you know that it doesn't make for increased effort or harmony.

People generally resist change, they even *fear* change, and they resent anything that suggests that they are being moved around like pawns on a chessboard. When a man knows, however, that his supervisors make it a practice to give adequate warning of changes, and the reasons for them, he doesn't fear or resist them nearly so much.

We can't always consult our employees before taking action or making decisions that affect them. It would be insincere, for example, to ask people for their ideas about some change that already has been decided on by higher authority or that simply has to be made.

We can, however, do the next best thing—

WE CAN GIVE ADEQUATE FOREWARNING AND EXPLANATION OF CHANGES.



"I forgot to tell you earlier, Jim, that your office is being moved down the hall."

10 TREAT PEOPLE AS INDIVIDUALS

At the same time that a supervisor builds up group solidarity, he remembers to treat everyone as an individual.

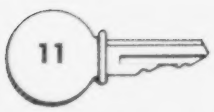
People vary widely in many of their characteristics. Well-timed praise may spur one person to new efforts of achievement. But it may only inflate another. A third may wilt under the slightest criticism, some other device must be used to make him improve.

No one likes to be known as the "file clerk," as the "typist," or as the "new man." He wants to be known as "Biff Harding," "Joe Smith," etc. We are all different. These differences are those qualities which distinguish one person from another.

Each one of us wants to be known for his own personal characteristics. Treating people fairly doesn't mean that you treat them as though they are faceless and anonymous.

When an employee feels that his supervisor is interested only in production and thinks of him only as an "instrument" rather than a person, he's not going to do his best work.

"Now, Whatchamacallit, I'm giving this assignment to you and Whosis here."



RECOGNIZE AND REWARD GOOD PERFORMANCE

Have you ever had your supervisor sincerely praise you for an achievement? It felt pretty good, didn't it? And it probably spurred you on to earn more of the same.

Failure to feed the basic craving for recognition—to "be someone"—accounts for perhaps half the troubles and maladjustments of people in Government and in private industry. The very size of most organizations results in submerging the individual.

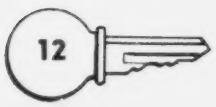
It's fairly easy to spot and reward meritorious performance. What form this reward should take will vary with the circumstances, all the way from a word of praise to a superior performance award or a promotion.

On the other hand, supervisors are sometimes concerned because employees who need praise most don't seem to do anything to earn it.

This concern stems from a mistaken idea that a person, to earn praise, must do something especially outstanding.

An employee need not be deprived of praise just because his overall performance isn't as good as that of others. If he makes fewer errors this week than last, he has at least earned recognition for what for him was probably a real achievement!

"You win this month's award for the most attractive workplace."



RECOGNIZE AND DISCOURAGE POOR PERFORMANCE OR CONDUCT

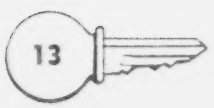
The reverse side of the coin of rewarding good performance is doing something about poor performance or conduct.

How much effort should be made to "salvage" an unsatisfactory employee can't be determined by any easy rule. A good supervisor tries, if possible, to give him a chance to improve. On the other hand, it's not fair to the rest of the group when one employee doesn't do his share of the work or when his conduct is unacceptable.

There are few supervisory defects that are more destructive to good order and good work than the failure, through timidity or otherwise, to deal competently with disciplinary problems. No supervisor can succeed if he lacks firmness in maintaining discipline or requiring good performance.

Being a good leader isn't a matter of continuous sweetness and light. A certain firmness—in the best sense of the word—is also needed. (See VA Pamphlet 5–21, "Common Sense About Taking Disciplinary Action.")

"Does it sometimes strike you, too, that Jones' work attitude leaves something to be desired?"



BE INTERESTED IN YOUR EMPLOYEES AS INDIVIDUALS

If one of your workers is worried about some personal problem, whether or not it is connected with the job situation, it is likely to affect his job satisfaction and effectiveness. While we have no desire to pry into the private lives of individuals, it does become a matter of concern to management when a maladjustment seriously interferes with a person's job performance.

If we give him a chance to talk about his problem he'll usually tell us what is bothering him. Perhaps we can help him to straighten it out or, at least, refer him to someone better qualified to assist him.

Often, when we know all the facts, we are amazed that the person is able to carry on as well as he does, considering his difficulties. The very fact that management is interested enough to care about the matter has an excellent effect on the employee.

"Ed, how long have you had the feeling as if you were living in a goldfish bowl?"

14 SEE TO IT THAT POSITIONS ARE PROPERLY DESCRIBED

Few things dishearten an employee as much as a conviction that *his* position is not allocated properly, as to grade, or that someone else's position is allocated higher than it should be.

Some of the things we can do to prevent any dissatisfaction in this respect are:

▲ PLAN POSITIONS CAREFULLY

- Avoid combining unrelated duties, where possible.
- Be sure that all work is assigned to a definite position.
- Eliminate duplication of effort.

▲ MAKE SURE JOBS ARE ACCURATELY DESCRIBED

- Provide the personnel office with complete and accurate information about each job.
- Don't understate or overstate the job.

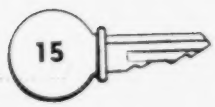
▲ KEEP JOB DESCRIPTIONS CURRENT

- Help the personnel office to complete the annual classification reviews on time.
- Report significant changes in assignments between surveys

▲ EXPLAIN THE CLASSIFICATION AND WAGE PLANS TO EMPLOYEES

- Answer their specific questions about it.

"Now Joe, under 'duties,' couldn't you put something else besides 'Whatever gets done around here, I do?'"



DEAL SYMPATHETICALLY WITH EMPLOYEE COMPLAINTS AND GRIEVANCES

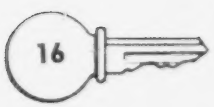
When one of your employees comes to you with what, to you, may seem a trivial complaint or grievance, listen attentively to his entire story. Remember, it's important to *him*. Just letting him "blow off steam" often clears the matter up.

Remember, too, that if you fail to handle complaints and grievances promptly and properly they may become serious problems.

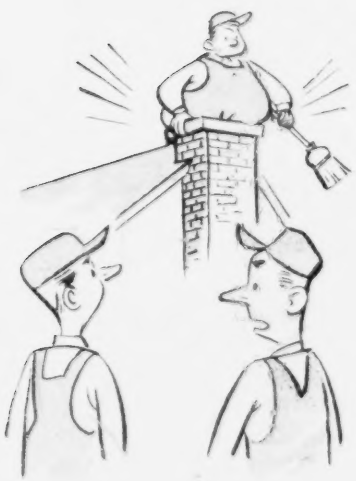
If the employee is emotionally upset, first try to calm him down and get him to relax before discussing his problem. Talk in private, if possible.

DON'T let him rush you into a decision, but DO give him your answer as promptly as possible. If you need time to get more information or to study the problem, tell him you will look into it and let him know what you decide.

Explain the reasons for your decision. Let him express his opinion on the proposed solution. Get his acceptance, if possible. Otherwise, tell him what further steps he may take under the VA's formal grievance procedure.



BE SURE THE RIGHT PERSON IS SELECTED TO FILL EVERY VACANCY



"I'm afraid Dave is too big a man for this job."

It's important to match the job and the person.

From the standpoint of a new employee's job satisfaction it is extremely important that he be placed in a job for which he is best qualified because:

- He can feel more secure in his job.
- The work will be interesting, challenging, and satisfying to him.
- He can use his best skills and talents.
- He knows he can do the work.
- He will have less fear of a poor work record.
- He can plan for self-improvement and possible promotion.
- He can become a member of the team and develop sound relationships more quickly.

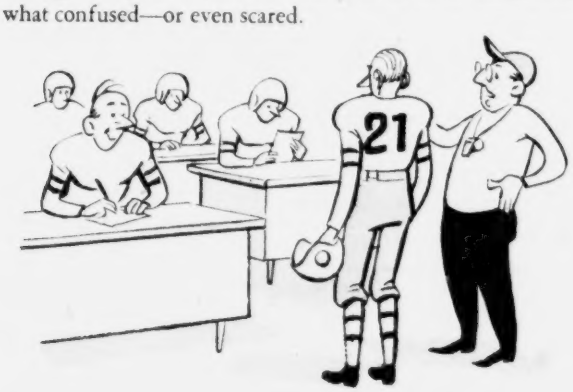
Selection of the right person is important to *you*, also, because it enables you to get your job done more effectively and more economically; quantity and quality of production can be maintained; and errors, waste, and spoilage of materials are reduced.

It makes your job of supervision easier, too, because it cuts down the time devoted to training; reduces turnover; makes for better employee morale and loyalty—and even reduces the need for disciplinary actions.

17 GET THE NEW EMPLOYEE OFF TO A GOOD START

Remember how uneasy you were the last time you stepped into a new job? Remember the impressions you had about what it was going to be like?

First impressions, regardless of their reliability, tend to be lasting. Any new worker is likely to be ill at ease, somewhat confused—or even scared.



"Come in here and I'll introduce you to the other members of our team."

In this frame of mind, his first experience, if properly planned, can give him a real sense of belonging to a worthwhile organization. These initial experiences can give him the basis for a feeling of security. The way he is treated during his early days provides a form of recognition and standing (or lack of it).

The task of orienting the new employee is one shared by the personnel office and you. The personnel office gives him general information during induction and at the time of group orientation several weeks later.

The rest of the information the employee needs is best given by you at the worksite. It should include such things as: showing a genuine interest in him, introducing him to those with whom he will work, acquainting him with unit rules and regulations, explaining the nature of his duties, and starting him on productive work as quickly as possible. Good job orientation pays off for you by hastening the day when the new employee takes his place as a full, effective member of the working team.

IT ALL ADDS UP TO . . .

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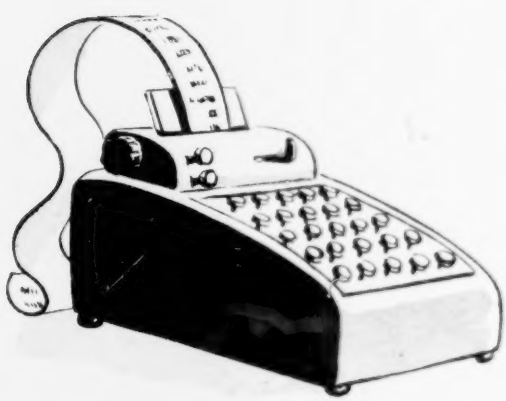

Ultimate responsibility for personnel management rests with operating supervisors like yourselves.

For this reason, the character of personnel administration throughout the VA depends upon how well our supervisors carry out their personnel management responsibilities. The success, therefore, of the entire personnel program is influenced—in fact, determined—by the manner in which you, as a supervisor, direct the work of your employees.

YOUR OWN SUCCESS, TOO, . . .

will be measured in terms of how much you, as a genuine leader, can inspire your workers to accomplish.

AND . . . THERE ARE OTHER REWARDS AS WELL . . .

- A sense of accomplishment and pride in your organization.
- The satisfaction of having a large part in the growth of people under your supervision.
- The improvement of the work "climate."
- More capable staffs.
- Increased efficiency and economy and, most important of all,
- BETTER SERVICE TO VETERANS.

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